



# Queensland Academy for Creative Industries

*Deb Arentz on architecture which fuels creativity and imagination*

Talented architects understand that the physical environment impacts on the way students learn and that smart learning spaces will enhance the teaching process. In fact, it was these philosophies that influenced architect Laurence Taylor from PDT Architects in Brisbane when he commenced work on the impressive Queensland Academy for Creative Industries (QACI), which opened last year.

The \$41 million academy was started in 2007 and is now open to an increasing enrolment of students from Years 10–12 who want a well-formed education and to flex their creative muscles in film, music or theatre using state-of-the-art facilities and technology. Students here can also take advantage of the academy's strong bonds with industry, including work placement and training from leading industry professionals.

## Challenging site

PDT Architects was commissioned by The Department of Education, Training and the Arts (DETA) in 2006 to design a state-of-the-art education facility, a centre that would become the Queensland Academy for Creative Industries (QACI) to educate elite students from around the state.

The site chosen by DETA was a prominent block of land at the corner of Blamey Street

and Musk Avenue in the Kelvin Grove Urban Village, "The Village Square" in Brisbane. The site posed a number of design challenges due to its prominent location, steep slope down Musk Avenue to Blamey Street and the adjacent parkland.

But the challenge was one which Laurence Taylor says he savoured. "The underlying principles were to provide a multi-level high rise education facility, which is something DETA had not attempted before and was itself a major deviation from the traditional methods of education," he told *Education Today*.

"This facility provides a place of interaction and stimulation for creativity and innovation while offering a sense of community both internally to the staff and students but also externally within the Kelvin Grove Urban Village.

"As a result, the building is visually interesting, has a legible urban environment at pedestrian scale, offers opportunity to allow the community of the Urban Village controlled entry into parts of the facility and is unique in appearance from the adjacent buildings in the village square."

Due to the nature of the sloping site it was decided to provide two entry points into the facility, (formal and informal) and to locate the access to parking at the highest point of the site, locating parking at what was to become level

three of a seven-level building. This offered major savings in cost and timing by avoiding major excavation work.

## The building

The building provides 6300 m<sup>2</sup> of floor space over seven levels and includes a double height art gallery for both student and public art exhibitions and a 250-seat theatre performance space which was constructed using the natural slope of the site – again to eliminate excavation works.

Other spaces include editing suites, art and music studios, a fully sound-proofed recording studio together with science laboratories, general teaching spaces and easily supervised break-out spaces.

"The building façade draws upon and counterbalances the rich diverse textures and colours of the surrounding urban environment," Laurence says. "The façade communicates the occupation of the building through the use of graphics on the sun shading and bold signage while the connection of the façade with the building's function of creative industry is evoked through the choice of the external colours communicating a bold, dynamic and creative style."

While it may be logical to assume that educational facilities must be designed with the



*Creative spaces at QACI*

intention of meeting the explicit programming needs of the staff and students, Laurence says few educational facilities are constructed with this ultimate goal as part of the overall vision.

“With regard to the school environment’s impact on students learning, the design of the building has a tremendous impact and the instructional process can be enhanced or severely undermined based on the facilities design,” he says.

“One of the most critical components of the overall design process when creating a dynamic educational facility is the development of the

projects design brief – the brief provides the basis for the basic construction of the facility, together with the master planning guidelines.”

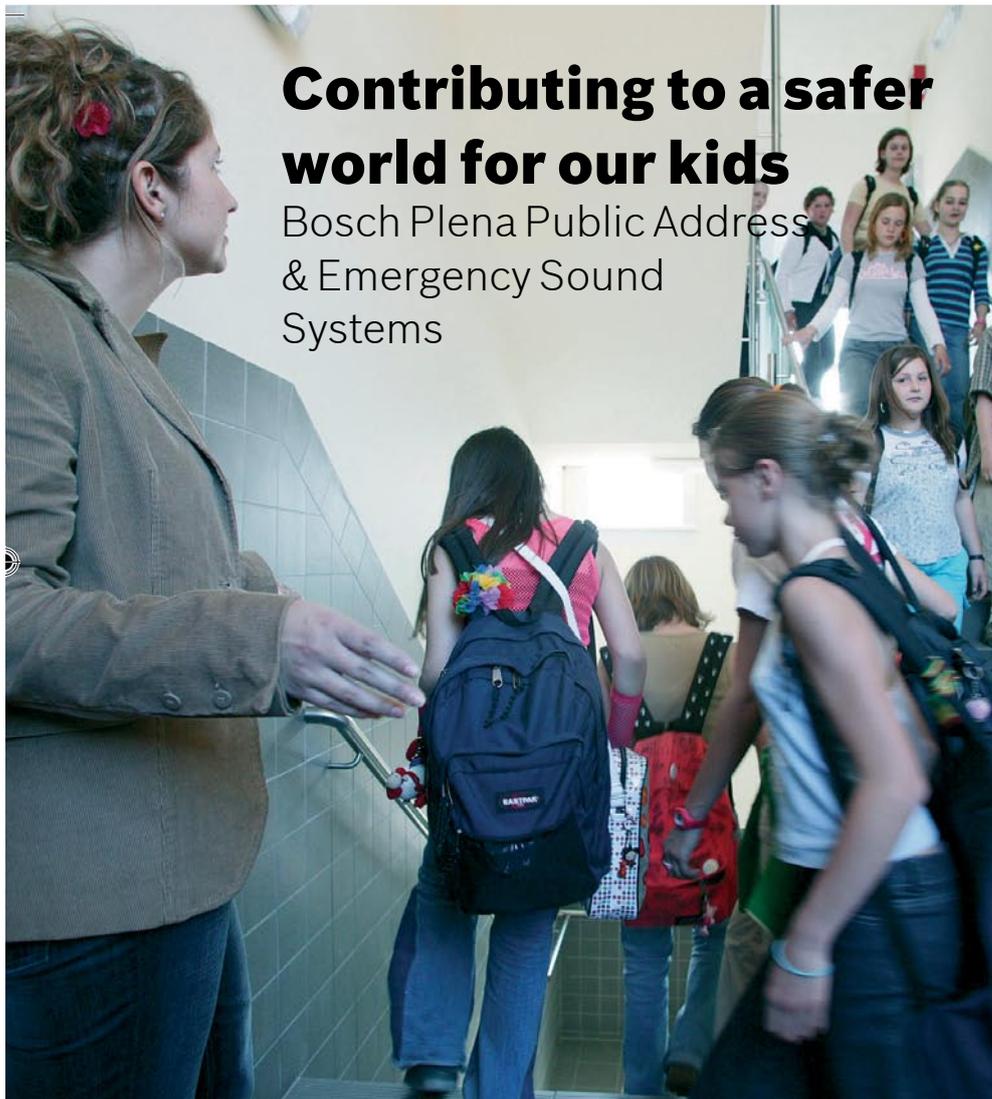
### Redefining ‘the clever country’

While for a long time, Australia has been keen to simply label itself as ‘the clever country’, now, in a world increasingly dominated by ideas rather than things, educationalists are actively questioning what it means to be a ‘clever country’ – other than a claim to the

Victa lawnmower and the Hills Hoist.

The Queensland Academy for Creative Industries’ principal, John Jose, says a ‘clever country’ gives its young people the skills and incentives they need to produce ideas and innovation, particularly in the creative industries to ensure the vitality of the economy and culture.

“...it is those economies who can lead [in] human services and creative capital, with core assets of innovation and creativity, which are going to thrive,” Mr Jose said. “Creativity has become an economically vital industry, rather



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*The Academy's theatre; right: one of the music studios*

than a merely individual pursuit.

"Today creative industries are predominately fuelled by ideas which are being shaped by modern technology and that technology has taken centre stage within the academy."

In fact the campus includes a smorgasbord of creative opportunity for its increasing student enrolment, with the digital music editing and sound recording studios as well as the open plan visual art studios with commercial gallery space.

Also making students technologically agile is the QACI building's wireless network, with students able to transfer large amounts of data (crucial for large digital-film or music files) from room to room or to external destinations.

### Engaged with the community

The academy, in keeping with its philosophy that the creative world no longer conforms to the notion of a socially and economically isolated 'artist', is not a hermetically-sealed institution.

Instead it encourages what is often an explosive fuel-air mixture for creativity: the interaction between its creative students, the public and other institutions.

Along with the performance theatre which is digitally linked to a film production studio with capability for whole-of-academy broadcasting, the focus on creative interaction also has the academy encouraging students to extend their education through units of university study with QUT and short courses through QACI partners such as Apple and the National Institute of Dramatic Arts (NIDA).

In the quest to produce Queensland and Australia's next leaders in the arts, multi-media, marketing, advertising and design, the academy has also redefined the relationship between teacher and student and student with the school's facilities.

"As Professor Erica McWilliam describes it in her recently released book *The Creative Workforce*:

*How to launch your students into high flying careers, the teacher has moved from sage on the stage to meddler in the middle,"* Mr Jose explains.

"This is a reflection of teachers learning with and challenging measured risk-taking in learning and exploration, with their students. The entire nature and feel of the facility sets a tone and environment for this."

Another bonus of this fascinating facility is the QACI's 4 Star Green Star rating which is in line with the requirements of the Kelvin Grove Urban Village. It has adopted a range of environmentally sensitive initiatives including rainwater harvesting for irrigation of landscaping, waste management which is 80% recycled, low VOC paints, efficient lighting and ventilation and reduction in the amount of car park spaces to create a reliance on public transport.

To find out more, visit [www.qaci.eq.edu.au/wcmss](http://www.qaci.eq.edu.au/wcmss).



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